

Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA)

What is methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA)?

Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*, or MRSA, is a type of *Staphylococcus* bacterium that has developed resistance to the antibiotics usually used to treat the infection including methicillin and other penicillins.

Staphylococcus aureus, often referred to simply as “staph”, are bacteria commonly carried on the skin or in the nose of healthy people.

Who gets MRSA?

Anyone can get MRSA, but it is found most often among persons in hospitals and healthcare facilities (such as nursing homes and dialysis centers) who have weakened immune systems. People in the community who get MRSA skin infections are more at risk in locations such as athletic facilities, dormitories, military barracks, correctional facilities, and daycare centers.

How is MRSA spread?

S. aureus, including MRSA, can be spread among people having contact (direct or indirect) with a person who either has a wound infection, an infection of the respiratory tract, or who is colonized with the bacteria. MRSA is almost always spread by direct physical contact, not through the air. Spread may also occur through indirect contact by touching objects (e.g., towels, wound dressings, workout equipment, sheets) contaminated by the infected skin of a person with staph bacteria or MRSA.

Does everyone who is exposed to MRSA become infected?

No. Some people become “colonized” which means that the bacteria are present, growing and multiplying without observable signs of disease. Colonization can occur on the skin surface, in the nasal passage, or in the urine. Colonization can lead to infection in persons who have weakened immune systems.

Other individuals can be exposed to MRSA and never become ill or colonized.

What are the symptoms of MRSA infection?

MRSA infections can cause a range of symptoms based on the part of the body that is infected. These may include wounds, burns, catheter sites, eyes, skin, and blood. Redness, swelling, and tenderness can occur at the site of infection. It may appear as a boil or infected area with pus.

How are MRSA infections diagnosed?

MRSA is diagnosed when a sample of the infected wound is taken to grow the bacteria in

the laboratory. Once the bacteria have grown, the laboratory will conduct tests to see which antibiotics will be effective for treating the infection.

What is the treatment for MRSA?

There are antibiotics available that are effective in treating a MRSA infection. Laboratory tests are generally done to determine which antibiotic should be given. It is important to take the entire dose of antibiotic, even if the infection is getting better. Do not share antibiotics with others, or save unfinished antibiotics to use at another time.

Do not attempt to treat an MRSA skin infection by yourself (popping, draining, using disinfectants); doing so could worsen or spread it to others. If you think you have a MRSA infection, cover the affected area, wash your hands, and contact a healthcare provider. Tell your doctor if your infection does not get better in a few days or if you begin to feel worse.

Are there complications from MRSA?

MRSA can be difficult to treat and it is possible, though rare, for the infection to progress to life-threatening blood or bone infections or pneumonia.

How can MRSA be prevented?

Careful handwashing is the most effective way to control the spread of MRSA.

If you have a MRSA skin infection, prevent spread to others by:

- Covering your wound with clean, dry bandages. Anyone caring for the wound should wear gloves.
- You and your close contacts should wash hands frequently with soap and warm water. After touching your infected site, wash your hands immediately.
- Do not share personal items such as towels, razors, or clothing that may have had contact with the infected wound. Wash all towels, sheets, and clothing with water and detergent. Drying items in a hot dryer, rather than air-drying, will help to kill the bacteria as well.
- Tell your doctor or other healthcare providers who treat you that you have or had had a MRSA skin infection.

How do I get more information on MRSA?

Calhoun County Public Health Department

Phone: (269) 969-6383

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Website: <http://www.cdc.gov/mrsa/>

Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*
Updated 4/24/12

This fact sheet is meant to provide general health information and is not intended to be medical advice or otherwise take the place of your doctor's orders or to diagnose your specific health problems. Check with your doctor if you have any questions or concerns about your health.

Calhoun County Public Health Department

190 E. Michigan Avenue, Suite A100
Battle Creek, Michigan 49014
Tel: (269) 969-6383
Fax: (269) 969-6488